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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, SEPTEMBER 28-OCTOBER 4

REF: A. NEW DELHI 03844
[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 04270

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[1](#)1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for September 28-October 4, 2007 that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

- Trucks Cross Indo-Pak Border for the First Time in 60 Years
- New Army Chief Assumes Office
- Protests and Rallies Portend Start of Election Season

Trucks Cross Indo-Pak Border for the First Time in 60 Years

[1](#)2. (U) For the first time in 60 years, trucks carrying cargo crossed the Wagah/Attari border from India into Pakistan October 1 (refs A, B). Since partition, all large-volume cargo between the intractable neighbors was sent via Dubai on ship, while all low-volume was driven up to the Wagah border and then hand-carried across by armies of porters. The pact to allow a limited number of trucks to drive across the border, agreed to August 1 by the Indian and Pakistani Sec retaries of Commerce, will reportedly increase direct trade by four to five times. The trucks will still be required to off-load at the customs house one kilometer inside the border. Dozens of Indian porters at the Attari border rioted during the inaugural truck crossing October 1, smashing truck windshields and threatening drivers, according to the media. The porters were reportedly angry and fearful that the new transport agreement could deprive them of their livelihood. The violence was contained and the truck crossing continued on schedule. Comment: Though a small gain economically, this is a huge step in the symbolic thaw between these two neighbors. End comment.

New Army Chief Assumes Office

[1](#)3. (SBU) General Deepak Kapoor took over as Chief of Army Staff in an official ceremony on September 30, replacing

outgoing General J.J. Singh, who retired after 43 years of service. In remarks to the press, Kapoor listed the continued modernization of the Army and improved relations and interoperability with the Indian Navy and Air Force as his two main policy priorities. He immediately faced questions regarding India's defense posture in Kashmir and views on the situation in Burma. On the former, Kapoor * who is set to travel to Kashmir this weekend as part of his first official visit in his new role) ruled out any troop reduction in the state, citing that "normalcy" had yet to return to the area even though infiltration levels were down.

On the latter, Kapoor maladroitley said only that it was important for the Indian military to maintain good relations with its counterparts in Burma, especially regarding operations targeting northeastern rebels operating out of the northern part of the country.

¶4. (U) According to press reports, Kapoor's ascendancy to the top position in the Army reflects his strong credentials and deep experience. In actuality, the position goes to the senior serving officer at the time of his previous Chief's retirement. His previous assignment was as Vice Chief of Army Staff, and his military resume is extensive. Commissioned in the Artillery Regiment in 1967, he fought in the 1971 war that resulted in the independence of Bangladesh.

He served as Chief Operations Officer for all UN peacekeeping forces in Somalia from 1994 to 1995. In the late 1990s, he was a brigade commander along the Line of Control. He went on to become corps commander in the Northeast. From 2005 to 2006, he served as the head of Northern Command. Kapoor is an alumnus of India's Defence Services Staff College, Army War College, and National Defence College.

Protests and Rallies Portend Start of Election Season

¶5. (SBU) Parts of northern India in the next week will

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experience a series of planned protests and rallies by various groups and political parties, marking the unofficial start of politicking in advance of what many expect to be early Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) elections sometime next year. In Rajasthan on October 2, Congress Party officials * including Member of Parliament (MP) Sachin Pilot * joined up to 60,000 Gujjars protesting for scheduled tribe status, which would avail them of quotas for government jobs and educational institutions. The protests took place across the state and resulted in the arrest of thousands. Unlike previous Gujar protests in late spring, this week's protests did not end in violence, mostly because Gujar leaders cautioned restraint and state officials made elaborate security preparations, such as setting up 259 temporary jails. Gujar leaders have promised further protests for October 11 if the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led state government fails to meet protesters' demands to recommend their scheduled tribe status to the central government. The issue likely will continue to provide the Congress Party more fodder with which to harangue the BJP.

¶6. (SBU) Embassy contacts in Uttar Pradesh (UP) report that UP Chief Minister and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati is calling for a party rally on October 9 in Lucknow, during which she hopes to draw up to one million participants. The rally is seen as a show of strength by the ruling BSP and provides a platform to celebrate the party's policy achievements during its first 150 days in office. Still enjoying its honeymoon phase in government, the BSP is keen to see early elections so that it can avoid India's traditional anti-incumbency hurdle and gain the 50 or more Lok Sabha seats hoped for by the party's leadership.

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